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Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Verein Sudwind Entwicklungspolitik, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The Situation of Women in the I.R. of Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran has insistently denied the existence of discrimination against women in law.[1] Nevertheless, the parliament and the government have consistently presented numerous bills and regulations limiting women, among which are: "Gender segregation at some universities and negative gender quota", "The veil & chastity" regulation, " Family bill", "Comprehensive population growth strategy and the family development bill" and many more. The macro-strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is driving women into the margins of employment and social arena.

Comprehensive Population Growth strategy and the Family Development

The aim of this strategy is allegedly: "Increasing the quality and quantity of population in the future". Nevertheless, some of the articles in the Bill have devastating effects on the lives of women.

Article 9 of this bill regarding the employment in the government and non-government institutions gives preference to: married men with children, married men without children and women with children. The employment of single women is possible in the absence of the above mentioned category of applicants.

Depriving women of equal access to employment would drive them to unregulated jobs with low income. Since 2012, women had been denied access to free birth control[2], the consequences of which are the unwanted children and the rise in illegal abortions which will put women's health at risk.

Initiating such strategies stems from the fact that women are viewed as instruments of population increase and therefore, the policymakers limit and deprive them of equal access to employment, independent income and education. These strategies deny women access to free birth control under the pretext of population decline. They also deny women equal access to divorce under the pretext of strengthening the family institution.

Denying women's rights in employment

According to Article 1117 of the Civil Code "Any man can prevent his wife to seek employment in jobs unsuitable for family honour or status." No clear definition is given to unsuitable job for the family and it is to the judge to decide on the matter.

Limited or unequal access to employment opportunities is manifested in unemployment or limited employment and a major contributor to women's poverty. Ratification of discriminatory laws has led to unrealistic views of women in the society.

As mentioned before the macro-policy of driving women away from social arena is clearly defined in article 9 of the newly presented bill. The Sharq newspaper reported that in the past 8 years and during the 9th and 10th governments, women's unemployment rate has doubled.[3]

Gender discrimination in Education This is one the major challenges women face at present. Apart from gender segregation and single sex education in some universities, in 2012 women were denied access to 77 fields in 36

[1] A/HRC/14/12/Add.1:
http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G10/140/58/PDF/G1014058.pdf?OpenElement
http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session7/IR/A_HRC_WG6_7_IRN_1_E.pdf
[2] http://khabaronline.ir/detail/240188/society/health
[3] http://persian-heritage.com/?p=33527

universities. Apart from the fields of engineering women were denied access to carpet-weaving, English language, history and many more in some universities.

Denying women enter the university for "improper Islamic Dress Code" is another strategy to discriminate women.

During 2011-2012, Iran University of Science and Technology suspended a number of students for one academic year for "Disregard of the Islamic dress code" and disobeying the university rules. The expulsion was carried out without prior notice or consultation or explanation.[4]

More and more universities apply segregation to control female students. For example since September 2011 segregation had been carried out in 647 sessions at the Open University of Varamin.

Control over female students has reached to a point where the president of Borojerd Open University declared that movements of girls at their dormitories would be sent to their parents via text messages.[5]

The Veil and Chastity Strategy

Since 1979, the veil had remained in place, controlled and regulated by the state. Iranian women are not free to choose the type or colour of their clothing. Women had continuously been harassed, humiliated and even assaulted, detained or fined for "improper veiling".

Recently, at a meeting with Social Council the Interior Minister announced that: "Every executive institution is responsible to enforce the Veil and Chastity scheme. The ministry of science is to oversee the execution of this policy at the universities as is the education minister for schools. They must present their reports to the ministry of interior." [6]

Domestic violence

The law in Iran is not void of any definition of domestic violence, nor does it have any measures to prevent it or support mechanisms for the victims. On the other hand, there exist some laws which directly or indirectly encourage violence at home. For example some articles in the Islamic Penal Code encouraging violence against women are: laws relating to sexual relations outside marriage (Zina) where punishment ranges from lashing to execution or stoning; Penalty of lesbianism, honour killings, forbiddance of abortion, criminal responsibility for girls at 9 years of age, the proportion of compensation (Diyeh), discrimination against women as witness (two women equals one man), the appointment of man as head of family, permission from husband to travel abroad, polygamy, men's right to divorce, unequal inheritance, men having sole right to custody, men's right to punish the child.

The imbedded discrimination in law limits women potential power for development and empowerment give rise to violence against them.

Violence against women in the society

The implementation of bills, directives and schemes such as forced veiling and anti-women policies and programmes has narrowed the social arena for women. It has also given rise to violence against women by the authorities. Enforcing the "Veil and chastity scheme" has made the streets unsafe. The police who are meant to protect and secure the streets had become the agent of insecurity and violator of women's rights to safe streets.[7]

[4] http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2012/03/137044.php
[5] http://ebrat.ir/?part=news&inc=news&id=43529
[6] http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/358648
[7] http://www.fardanews.com/fa/news/205264

Overall, violence in the society has increased due to poverty, unemployment, inflation and insecurity. However, women have become the first victims of violence and sexual assault, gang-rapes, murders in the street and acid attacks have increased throughout Iran.

Violence against women is not addressed and dealt with as a social problem. The Islamic Penal Codes (Articles 630 and 220) regarding honour killings and numerous other laws and discriminatory policies have made women vulnerable to social and domestic violence. Local news are full of cases of wife killing, husband killing, self-burn, girls escaping home and suicide.[8]

At present as ever, women's activism to address women's issues is labelled as an act against the state and punishable by detention and imprisonment. The One Million Signature Campaign which began in 2006 to address the discriminatory laws was halted by the authorities under such label.

Women political participation

According to articles 115, 110, 91 and 157 of the Constitution, women cannot be appointed as the supreme leader or president; nor can they sit at the Assembly of Experts of the leadership, the Guardian Council, or appointed as head of judiciary and as Islamic judge. Since the establishment of the Islamic republic and during the 8 rounds of parliamentary elections, out of 2860 deputies only 54 were women. These are all against the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which has been ratified by Iran on 1975 as well as against VDPA and the outcome of Vienna+20.

Sexual minorities

Lesbians mostly hide their identity from family and the society. Their existence is denied (Ahmadinejad said Iran has no homosexual)[9] and they have no legal rights. According to Islamic Penal Code, sexual relation among same sex is forbidden. The punishment for for women is flogging for the first 3 times and then execution. Transsexuals are legally and socially accepted but lack of proper health care and psychological support often leads to psychological disorders.

Lesbians are regarded as sexually unhealthy and families often seek their treatment. Homosexuals frequently change sex to escape persecution and punishment. A number have left the country and mostly live in the neighbouring Turkey. It takes years for them to be granted refugee status by the UN and sent to a safe country. They face inhumane behaviour in low paid illegal jobs, humiliation and violence and rape while waiting. Transgenders are in need of urgent medication. Unable to provide the costs a number have lost their lives.[10]

Discrimination in sport

Women must wear full Islamic veil during sports performances which makes it difficult for them to manoeuvre. They are prevented to participate in certain sports. Women are also barred from stadiums during matches. Women's participation in the international games is determined through personal choice of authorities rather than certain standards.[11]

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[8] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/24/AR2007092401042.html
http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2007/09/070924_bd-ahmadinejad-columbia.shtml

[9] http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/09/24/AR2007092401042.html

[10] Marjan Ahoorai died on 3rd April 2013 with 29 on lack of treatment
http://www.radiozamaneh.com/61164#.Usxq8PRDs75

[11] Neda Shahsavari who has already taken part in table tennis matches in Olympics was not allowed to travel to take part in Asian Cup.

Recommendations:

- Demand the Islamic Republic of Iran to cancel gender segregation, negative gender ratio and single sex education directives in the universities,
- Cancel the Veil and Chastity regulations, family bills and stop the Comprehensive population growth strategy bill from ratifying,
- Eradicate all discrimination and limitations in law and pave way to women's full participation in the affairs of the country including political participation in all ranks,
- Stop discrimination and violence against women by individuals or institutions especially the intelligence apparatus,
- Stop discrimination of LGBT community.